

The King Who Cares

Matthew 18:11-14

Introduction

This beloved parable has been called the parable of “The Lost Sheep” and sometimes the parable of “The Seeking Shepherd”.

The message is both for believer and unbeliever. The Parable is repeated in Luke in a different context. On this occasion Jesus speaks to His Disciples and in Luke’s gospel the parable is directed to an audience that is largely lost. In Luke’s Gospel the Pharisees and the scribes were complaining; “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). Jesus goes on and says; “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, I have found my sheep which was lost!” Eight times in that chapter in Luke’s gospel the lost condition of human beings is emphasized (twice in Luke 15:4; 6,8,9,17,24, 32).

In Luke’s gospel the sheep is lost; in Matthew’s gospel the sheep have gone *astray*.

In Matthew’s gospel the King makes His great statement of purpose—Jesus came to save the lost. This is why Jesus left Heaven and came to earth—Jesus left the glory of heaven—and its privileges and ‘emptied Himself’—of that glory to pursue us! In Matthew’s gospel God is seen like a protective shepherd.

We are reminded that the whole earth collectively and each individual on that earth has gone astray. “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned everyone, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa.53:6). All are in a wilderness of sin and doomed to be destroyed in that wilderness unless they are reached and saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. **The Bible teaches that everyone needs to be saved (see Rom.3:10-18;23; 10:13; John 3:16; Acts 10:43; 1 John 5:1).**

Jesus likens Himself to a conscientious shepherd deeply concerned over the loss of a single sheep; willing to focus time and attention to pursue that which has gone astray. Believers are sometimes weak—or immature or stubborn and some lose passion or interest or motivation and wander back into a life of sin and shameful behavior. Some are stubborn and selfish and some may rationalize their sinful behavior by very real hurt or abuse or neglect or challenges. Some allow their pain and hurt and offense to mushroom into a stew of bitterness or anger or hostility based on the perceived offense and justify their sinful behavior. There are as many reasons to sin as there is sin. Jesus reminds us that one who strays or the one who gets separated is loved and cared about. That Jesus came for the lost (v.11) and cares for the lost (v. 13) and forgives and rejoices over recovered sheep (v.13).

Jesus Came To Save The Lost (v.11)

Matthew 18:11 (NKJV) For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

How in the world did human beings come to be lost?

The Bible teaches that *God lost man*; not that God misplaced or forgot man; but our first parents—Adam and Eve sinned. Sin made it impossible to have fellowship with God, or worship God or serve God. According to the Bible man has gone *astray*; we are lost in the wilderness of sin. We do not seek after God and we have become all together unprofitable (Rom.3:11-12).

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Paul wrote to the Romans (3:10-12) “As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; They have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.”

We are lost to God because we are unable to do what we were created to do; love, worship and serve the Lord. I want to draw attention to the words; *that which was lost*. “*They are in the Greek neuter participle. This means that the person lost is not only man (masculine) but woman (feminine) as well. “That (neuter) which was lost” and sought after is both man and woman. The point is to show the span of Jesus’ love: He loves all who are lost, both man and woman. No one is outside the scope of His love and seeking. He loves and seeks after all” (The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible Matthew 2; p.45).*

Jesus Continues To Seek The Lost (v.12)

12 “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying?”

The Lord Jesus will make three powerful points:

1. The sheep have gone astray.
2. The sheep are sought by the shepherd.
3. The sheep are sought in the mountains.

Jesus asks the question; “What do you think?” Think about what? Think about the context! Jesus has speaking about the subject of greatness (vv.1-6) and used the illustration of a little child (v.6). Jesus reminded us that God cares about His children; and when we honor a little child when honor the Savior Himself. We were also warned about the severe penalties for ill treatment or abuse of children (v.6). It would be better if a millstone were hung around the offender’s neck and cast into the sea. We learned that angels are assigned to protect them (v.10) and it is in that context that Jesus says it is the will of the Father to bring all little children safely into His sheepfold (vv.11-14).

What happened? What is in that wilderness or those mountains that caused the sheep to wander? We can’t always know that goes through the mind of a sheep—or the mind of a person who decides to leave the safety and security of the shepherd and the flock. Do they smell fresh water or lush green fields and simply leave? Is it as simple as not paying attention or something more complex? Is it the refusal to heed repeated warnings to stay with the group? Is it a refusal to acknowledge the dangers and disappointments that take place absent the shepherd?

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What does it mean to go astray? It means that the person has left fellowship with God—it means that the person may have forsaken a right relationship and fellowship with God due to false teaching or wandered down a dangerous road or fallen into sin.

William Jenkyn wrote; “To forsake Christ for the world is leave a treasure for a trifle. . . eternity for a moment, reality for a shadow.”

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “The backslider is a man who, because of his relationship to God, can never really enjoy anything else.”

Are you miserable? That’s good. Anything less than a right relationship with God should make you miserable. Anything less than full and final pardon, forgiveness and joy is far less than what God wants for you!

F.W. Norwood wrote; “Life’s greatest tragedy is to lose God and not to miss Him.”

In the parable the shepherd is counting heads. The shepherd has a large flock to tend but makes it his business to know each one. When one was missing the shepherd ‘knew’ the sheep was gone. He missed the sheep. And he went after it. I think it is also interesting that the shepherd doesn’t send other sheep to go look for the wandering one. He doesn’t even enlist the help of other shepherds.

The shepherd will go himself.

The Lord knows when we have taken a detour. The Lord knows when we have fallen into error or sin.

In the parable the shepherd is patient and enduring. The shepherd keeps looking until the sheep is either found or the shepherd knows there is no chance that the sheep can be found alive. The shepherd is willing to check every path, every crevice, every ridge, every cave, the shepherd uses all the resources at his disposal.

The shepherd depends on the harshness, danger and trials and sufferings in the wilderness to sufficiently motivate the sheep to go back to the shepherd. The shepherd depends on the sheep’s memory of the safety, security, guidance and care of the shepherd. The shepherd relies heavily on his voice to reach the ears and heart of the lost sheep.

Again hearing and voice are all very dependent on proximity. The farther the distance the less likely the sheep will hear. Does the sheep even have the strength to answer (respond)? Has the wilderness or predators taken an awful toll? Is the sheep injured or dying—unable to respond?

Have you taken a detour away from God and Christ? Are you lost in the mountains? Saints sometimes wander. We do sometimes fall. We have a Savior ready to catch us.

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Jesus Considers The Lost (v.13a)

13And if he should find it,

We are left with the impression that the Shepherd may or may not find the lost sheep.

Comedian Rodney Dangerfield was famous for not getting respect. He talked about getting separated from his parents as a small child on a crowded beach. Rodney asked a cop if he could get some help finding his parents. The police officer looked at him and said, "I don't know kid, there's a lot of places they could hide."

Do some people deliberately hide from God?
I think you know the answer.

Churches all across America have made a conscious effort to adopt creative ways to reach out to the lost. The so called seeker-sensitive movement had drawn a great deal of criticism from some quarters. Is it wrong to find creative ways to reach out to the young or the old or the people who are single or divorced?

I don't think so. Should we abandon sound theology and doctrine rich sermons for Christian TED talks and shallow teaching? I don't think so. Paul will become all things to all men that he might reach some; but Paul never compromised the Gospel or abandoned essential Christianity or sought shallow solutions to the problem of sin.

How far had the sheep wandered? Can the lost sheep hear the voice of the shepherd crying in the mountain wilderness? Is the lost sheep willing to respond to the shepherd's voice? What happens when the sheep wanders further and further away?

Who are the sheep who are not found? I am going to suggest this is the person who willingly, repeatedly and permanently refuses to trust God in Christ. The person who rejects the seeking shepherd will remain lost. But God doesn't want that to happen!

The Lord wants faithful servants who will be a part of God's rescue team.

Does the contradict what I said earlier? Jesus is the shepherd who seeks and saves the lost. But we can be a part of the team that provides opportunity to grow, discipleship, fellowship, and small group ministry. Support, encouragement and prayer all demonstrate our Savior's constant care.

Andrew Murray said, "There is no one so far lost that Jesus cannot find him and cannot save him."

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Jesus Corrects And Rejoices When The Lost Are Found (v.13b)

assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.

God's love is personal.
God's love is patient.
God's love is seeking.

Most of you know that sheep do not always enjoy a favorable reputation. Thank God Jesus does not cast us aside because of our weakness, our failures, our infirmities or our shortcomings! A husband does not put away his wife for some failing! A mother does not forsake or abandon her child because it is weak, or feeble or ignorant. And Jesus does not cast off the poor sinner who has committed his or her life to Him—for blemishes and imperfections. No—it is the glory of Jesus to pass over faults and heal backsliding and impart grace and pardon faults.

Does the shepherd neglect the ninety-nine at the expense of the one? I don't think we need to make the parable say something Jesus never intended.

Jesus makes it clear that there is forgiveness and rejoicing over the recovered sheep. Does this extreme joy come from the fact that their sheep was somehow more valuable or more loved than the other sheep? No. The sheep that are safe fill the shepherd's heart with joy and peace. How are we to think about the shepherd's reaction?

Remember the lost sheep might have remained lost forever! If the sheep were gone it could make no contribution either to the flock or the shepherd. There is great joy when we are delivered from great danger or harm. There is another reason—think of all the time and effort the shepherd has invested in the sheep. So much of the shepherd's life and thoughts and energy and effort and sacrifice and suffering. **The shepherd has made the decision that his energy and effort and are worth the life of the sheep.**

In Luke's gospel you will remember that Jesus has the shepherd come home to friends and families and says; "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. He adds there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents—more than ninety nine just persons who need no repentance (see Luke 15:6-7).

Again—for the same reasons—they could have been lost forever—the shepherd has made such a sacrifice to save!

This is in stark contrast to the worthless shepherds criticized by the prophets.

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“Woe to the worthless shepherd that leaveth the flock, the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened” (Zec. 11:7 NEV).

Jesus Comprehends God’s Will For The Lord (v.14)

14Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Don’t miss the transition from verse 10 where Jesus says; “Take heed that do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels see the face of My Father who is in heaven” and here where Jesus reminds the disciples the same Father is “your Father who is heaven”.

The Savior finds us—and we become a part of His family—we are members of God’s forever family. And as members of this family we are given permission to reach out to the lost sheep and care for the flock.

Who are “these little ones” that Jesus makes reference? These are genuine believers! These are blood bought born again Christians.

The word ‘perish’ often carries the meaning of ruin, destruction or death. It can sometimes mean non-permanent ruin or loss or temporary loss. Perish here more likely refers to spiritual devastation rather than ultimate spiritual destruction (see MacArthur’s Bible Commentary; p. 1157).

The passage can’t mean Universal Salvation (all will eventually be saved). Jesus has told us too many times about the eternal consequences of a permanent rejection of God’s plan of salvation. Jesus is in effect saying God the Father does not want a single Christian to be spiritually wounded or ruined. Whenever you hurt another Christian you are setting yourself up as an antagonist to the will of the Father. When we as Christians fall into sin it ruins our usefulness to Him and to each other. Have you stumbled or fallen? Then you should be happy to know the Father is overjoyed to have you back, Jesus rejoices and the angels in heaven celebrate. Believers cannot afford to look down on other believers.

Again remember the context—we must not offend the children (v.6); despise the children (v.10) or allow them to perish apart from Christ (v.14). Backslidden parents—worldly parents—care for your children. Bring them to Christ.

Conclusion

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Alexander Zolzhenitsyn told a booing crowd of Ivy League students; “If I were called upon to identify the principle trait of the entire twentieth century, I would be unable to find anything more precise than to repeat once again, “Men have forgotten God.”

But God has not forgotten men. Jesus is still committed to seek and save the lost.

Are you running from God? Hiding from God? Thomas Adams said, “If thou wilt fly from God, the devil will lend thee both spurs and a horse.”

Jesus is the good shepherd. He will come after you. He will cry out to you. You can hear his voice echoing in the mountains, crying in the wilderness, pleading in the desert. Stop running. Come home.

Confess your sin. Repent. Return. Remember.

Jesus rejoices and forgives over recovered sheep. Let Him take you in His strong arms back to the flock—back to friendship and back to fellowship. Let Him wash you and bind up your wounds.

**All we like sheep
Have gone astray
Each of us turning
Our own separate way
We have all sinned and
Fallen short of Your glory
But Your glory is
What we desire to see
And in Your presence is
Where we long to be**

**Taking our sickness
Taking our pain
Jesus the sacrifice Lamb
Has been slain
He was despised
Rejected by men
He took our sin
Draw us near to you, Father
Through Jesus Your Son
Let us worship before You
Cleansed by Your blood**

DON MOEN